

## The impact of re-entry policy on girls who fall pregnant and re-admitted back to school in selected schools in Mpongwe district

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### Abstract

The re-entry policy was launched in 1997: this policy advocates that girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy should be re-admitted after giving birth. The aim of this policy is to implement measures that will help prevent the exclusion of young mothers from furthering their education. In the event of a girl been forced out of school due to pregnancy, the Ministry of Education has provided guidelines to assist schools and other stakeholders such as parents and guardians to ensure that girl is enabled to complete her education.

Despite the re-entry policy being in existence for 18 years now, little has been done to focus on the challenges faced by girls who fall pregnant and re-admitted back to school. Therefore, the study addresses the challenges faced by girls who fall pregnant and re-admitted back to school in selected schools in Mpongwe District. If these challenges are not addressed hastily, they will impede girls' progress even when they go back to school after pregnancy.

The methodology used in this study included research design, target population, sampling techniques, data collection methods and data analysis. In this study the views of the teachers and the re-admitted a girls are presented. The study calls for a shift of attention and redistribution of energies in addressing the challenges faced by the re-admitted girls in order to enhance the proper implementation of the policy. The findings of this study further shows that although the policy is perceived to be good its guidelines are not clear on how many times the girl should be re-admitted.

It is therefore recommended that the future policies should take into account the views of beneficiaries and implementers at school level before policy directives are sent to schools so that they can prepare and adjust accordingly. There is need for the Ministry of Education to recognize a concept of contingency and allow for diversity of views and perspectives from other stakeholders. The ministry of Education and Schools should broaden their monitoring tools to enable them monitor and provide support for girls, so that they do not temporarily return and dropout completely. The Ministry of Education should strengthen the guidance and counseling sections at school level and incorporate the aspect of providing emotional and psychological support for the re-entry girls. Schools should hold, "massive sensitization workshops for teachers, parents/guardians and pupils time to time. The Schools should promote the presence of clubs and broaden their roles so that the re-admitted girls can be accommodated.

**Keywords:** the re-entry policy, challenges faced by girls, impact on victims

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

When the Zambian Government introduced the re-entry policy in 1997, the aim was to ensure that girls who fell pregnant while at school could go back and complete their education. This was in response to the apparent limited opportunities by the girl child who had been forced to drop out of school the moment they became pregnant.

Oliver, P. (1996) <sup>[8]</sup>, "To the contrary, the male child enjoyed unfettered freedom and managed to complete his education even after impregnating someone". Although the policy remains enforce 17 years after being implemented, there is a growing concern that it has not served its objectives. The number of female pupils dropping out of schools because of pregnancies are still high, while those that are re-entering after breast feeding is too small.

For instance, figures from the Ministry of Education indicate that the number of girls that are falling pregnant have increased from 3,663 in 2002 to more than 17,600 this year. The Forum for Women Educationists (FAWE) was compelled to investigate the effectiveness of school re-entry policies for adolescent mothers in six Southern African countries

including Zambia in 2012 as part of its efforts to improve life opportunities for young girls.

FAWE's research has shown that teenage girls continue to drop out of school due to pregnancy, with many of them failing to return to school after childbirth. This was probably authenticated by FAWE's subsidiary in Zambia. The Forum for Women Educationists of Zambia (FAWEZA) recently estimated that up to 15,000 school girls fall pregnant every year in the country.

Unfortunately, FAWEZA noted that the number of teenage mothers benefiting from the school re-entry policy is low. This is because girls who fell pregnant outside marriage are mostly forced into marriage, curtailing their education.

Oliver, P. (1996) <sup>[8]</sup>, "There is need for more sensitisation to ensure that every parent is aware about this policy so that more and more female pupils go back to school after delivering". The Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health says 17,600 female pupils fell pregnant in 2013 alone.

As if that is not bad enough, only 6,000 of that figure managed to return to school after delivering their babies. "This confirms that a lot of adolescents are indulging themselves in sexual

activities,” said Community Development, Mother and Child Development Deputy Minister Ingrid Mphande. “Many adolescents face peer pressure to engage into alcohol and sexual relationships at an early age. This has resulted into unwanted pregnancies and infections such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV and AIDS.”

According to the Ministry of Education, only 4,692 girls were re-admitted into schools after delivering their babies out of 12,370 that had fallen pregnant in 2008.

Similarly, 5,517 went back to school after breastfeeding their babies out of 13,634 female pupils that were impregnated in 2009. A pregnancy on the girl child has a great deal of negativity in two fold. As well as curtailing her education, she is also forced to sacrifice her childhood because of going into marriage at a tender age.

But while many children have been enmeshed in shame and stigma after getting pregnant, others have resolved to soldier on and complete their education. “I became pregnant when I was in grade 10 and I thought it was not wise for me stop my education so I decided to return when my baby was six months,” said Elizabeth Pondani (not her real name).

“I have learnt from my mistakes which came because of the peer pressure, and I believe that many of my friends can learn from me. Although many are ashamed to do what I have done, I strongly feel education is important.” Education experts feel that the policy was well intended although the social and cultural norms have played a significant role in shaping the minds of those who fell pregnant.

“The policy was introduced to regulate the wastage of girls because the government realised that many female pupils who fell pregnant were forced to sit at home,” said Ferdinand Chipindi, a lecturer at the University of Zambia (UNZA). “But there have been social and cultural norms where for instance, the girls are called by their baby’s names rather than theirs, which makes them uncomfortable and would therefore opt to sit at home or go into marriage.”

Mr. Chipindi said there was need to ensure that the re-entry policy considered the social and cultural norms associated with adult education in order to make it more effective and achieve its objectives. The Ministry of Education notes that although the re-entry policy has seen a low number of female pupils getting back into schools after breastfeeding, it has achieved its objectives.

“In a nutshell, we can say as a Ministry that we are happy, the policy has achieved its objectives,” said Ministry spokesperson, Hilary Chipango. “But we realise that there is need for more sensitisation to ensure that every parent is aware about this policy so that more and more female pupils go back to school after delivering.”

Mr. Chipango noted that the re-entry policy had offered an opportunity to the girl child to ensure that pregnancy was not a barrier to her progress in education. It is indisputable that Zambia’s school re-entry policy was well intended especially in a Zambian society which has been characterised by inequality among men and women.

However, it is hardly exaggeration of truth to state that the policy has not fully achieved its objectives in the 17 years that it has been in existence. The media is currently awash with reports of teenage pregnancies as well as early marriages while the number of those that are returning to school after giving birth is not encouraging. It is therefore hoped that apart from raising awareness about the existence of the policy, a

review could be done to address emerging issues in the implementation of the policy like social and cultural norms.

Kelly (1996) <sup>[4]</sup> outlines a number of challenges in the education of girls in Zambia. Disparities that persist in favour of boys/males literacy rates, school enrolments, completion rates and education attainments most of which are contributing factors to high dropout rates among girls. From the very beginning men had a head start and they were offered education that was superior to that offered to women. This trend continued well into the independence period when there were more places for boys than for girls.

One other barrier, as girls grew older when fell pregnant, girls who became pregnant were expelled from school and were not re-admitted into the school system. There were some girls who became pregnant after been raped. In many cases, girls were made pregnant by fellow pupils. The boys were also expelled if reported to the school authorities but in most cases they were not reported and they continued with their education. This was a launch pad for the re-entry policy (Msango, 2000) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Zambia is part of and a signatory to a number of international conventions on the right to education for all upon which the re-entry is based. The country recognizes the education of children as a basic human right as enshrined in article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is also stated in the United Nations Convention on Rights of a child (CRC), article 28. Education is a right that is also guaranteed by the policy of Education for all (EFA), the Zambia National Gender policy (ZNGP) and the United Nations Platform for Action (UNFPA), the Beijing Declaration and millennium development Goals (MDGs). The re-entry policy is grounded in the outcomes of the 1995 Beijing conference at which the women’s movement drew up its own action plan. In September, 1997 the re-entry policy was launched. It advocates that girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy should be re-admitted after giving birth. The aim of the policy is to prevent the exclusion of young mothers from furthering their education. Therefore, to turn a blind eye on the challenges faced by girls who are re-admitted into school will deter the full implementation of the policy (Mwansa, 2011) <sup>[7]</sup>. Hence forth the researcher designed a study to investigate the challenges faced by the girls re-admitted to school after pregnancy in Mpongwe District.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the re-entry policy being in existence for 18 years now, little has been done to focus on the challenges faced by girls who fall pregnant and re-admitted back to school. Therefore, the study addresses the challenges faced by girls who fall pregnant and re-admitted back to school in selected schools in Mpongwe District. If these challenges are not addressed hastily, they will impede girls’ progress even when they go back to school after pregnancy.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the challenges faced by girls who fall pregnant and re-admitted back to school in Mpongwe District. This is with a view to add to the already existing knowledge on the re-entry policy and highlight the challenges so as to avail the stakeholders with information needed to enhance the implementation of the policy.

#### 1.4 Objective

The objectives of this study are:

- To find out some of the challenges faced by girls who are re-admitted back to school after pregnancy.

#### 1.5 Research Questions

What challenges are faced by the girls who are re-admitted back to school after pregnancy?

#### 1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of the study might provide information for policy makers, school managers and other key players and suggest measures to be put in place to prevent such a situation from recurring in future.

#### 1.7 Limitations of the Study

Due to resource constraints the scope of the research was limited to Mpongwe District and this implies that results might not be generalized to other parts of the province.

#### 1.8 Literature Review

The literature review explores and reviews literature relevant to the re-entry policy since the study was investigating the challenges faced by girls re-admitted to school after pregnancy. Literature was drawn from a wide range of sources. This includes the Ministry of education and key stakeholders in promoting girl child education access, progress and completion.

Ministry of Education (2004), re-entry girls reviews that, the policy was good but it did not address most of their concerns. The girls explained that while at school, they felt stigmatized by their friends and teachers through derogatory remarks such as addressing them by their children's names such as "bana Kangwa (mother of kangwa)" which made them feel out of place. The girls further stated that the Ministry of Education was doing very little to enforce the implementation of the policy and ensure that the girls who returned to school were protected from verbal abuse by the teachers. This is due to the fact that such utterances discouraged and negatively affected their performance.

Mwansa (2011) <sup>[7]</sup> states that, although the policy is perceived to be good, various categories of people such as the church, schools and members of parliament particularly those from opposition parties consider the policy to be someone's agenda influenced by the donor community. As a result the Catholic Secretariat (2007), clearly states that, administrators of grant-aided schools did not allow girls who fell pregnant to be re-admitted but rather assisted them to transfer to other schools. Based on the notion that they would influence their friends to become pregnant too. However the girls reviewed that some of them would have loved to stay at the same school. On the other hand, head teachers reported that policy making process in the Ministry of Education was non-inclusive as a result faces rejection when it comes as a directive for schools to implement. Though the possibilities of its guidelines being well intended, were not sensitive to the nuances of target group and implementers at school level (Chilisa, 2002) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Malawi and Botswana show similar implementation disparities as those found in grant-aided schools in Zambia. Reports from these countries indicated that when girls were re-admitted to school they found a hostile environment. They stated that their schools saw them as bad influence and

preferred them to go to other schools, (FAWE, 2004) <sup>[2]</sup>. In a similar study in Kenya, Amondi (2008) report that school head teachers fear allowing re-entry girls because of the stigma associated with having mothers in pupil environment. This is due to the fact that their schools are mockingly referred to as "maternity schools" and this openly encourages isolation of the re-entry girls. She further observed that this is one of the challenges the re-entry girl's face hence they opt to transfer or temporally stay in the same school and drop out completely after a few months.

Despite the acclaimed achievement of the policy, recent statistics from the ministry of education (2009) preliminary statistical bulletin shows that 15,497 girls got pregnant at basic and high school level in 2008/ and only 6,697 were re-admitted. Only about 4000 completed their education, leaving about 2,697 of the re-admitted girls unable to complete their education, the contributing factors were hostile environments and lack of support at school level.

Sifuniso (2005) explain that, girls who attend coeducational schools suffer teasing and taunting than those that attend all girls' schools. Therefore, girls in coeducational schools prefer to go to different schools after having a baby. She further added that some schools are situated in residential areas and draw their pupils from the locality; hence re-admitted girls prefer to transfer to other schools. A teacher from a certain school gave an example of a certain school built in a compound where a certain girl fell pregnant. Everyone knew her, greets the girl with a child on her way to and from school. In keeping with tradition they now call her by her child's name even when she is with her classmates. In the end she becomes so isolated at school because her friends at school mockingly address her using her child's name.

The Post Newspaper Sunday (p.5721, 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2015) a ministry of education official in Eastern province reports that in that year alone 2,500 girls become pregnant and a significant percentage of them will not come back to school. He further stated that those who do not return to school are scared of the stigma being mothers in class among their teachers and peers. The question is, does the ministry of education deal with this problem and how can we hope to prevent continued recurrence of a girl child becoming pregnant in the process of getting educated. There must be underlying factors contributing to this trend even when girls are accorded a second chance to complete their education. They are having second thoughts about returning to school.

In contrast to the policy of exclusion that preceded it, the re-entry policy advocates that girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy should be re-admitted after giving birth. The aim of this policy is to find more innovative measures to help prevent the exclusion of young mothers from completing their education. In the event of a girl been forced out of school due to pregnancy, the Ministry of Education in Zambia has provided guidelines to assist schools and other stakeholders such as parents and guardians to ensure that girls are enabled to complete their education. Kelly, M.J. (1996) <sup>[4]</sup>, "Despite having the policy in place a considerable number of girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy do not return after giving birth". In cases where they return they opt to transfer to another school. It has also been observed that those that dropout temporally return and then dropout completely after a few months of being in school (FAWEZA, 2008). As a result the researcher designed a study to highlight some of the

challenges faced by the girls who are re-admitted back to school after pregnancy.

From the time government introduced the re-entry policy, civil society, the church and other stakeholders have joined hands to see to it that young mothers are able to complete their education by going back to school. Before 1991, once a girl dropped out of school for falling pregnant, it would mark the end of her enrolment in any education system. This led to early marriages and usually through difficult circumstances such as forced marriages.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has also introduced affirmative action in favour of girls at Grade 7 and Grade 9 levels. Girls require slightly lower scores than boys to proceed to the next level to ensure retention of girls in the education system for longer periods.

According to the Ministry of Education Permanent Secretary Andrew Phiri, government is on course towards construction of 100 high schools around the country in order to meet the MDG goal. Phiri said currently there were 50 high schools under construction while 37 were under evaluation. Scaling up school infrastructure development projects aims to decongest and encourage more pupils to access education especially girls.

The initiatives are a direct response to persistent gender gaps in education. The long term impact of this is evident in having few women in leadership positions. Global trends indicate that teenage pregnancies are a major social problem and according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) the problem has assumed endemic proportions among teenagers, especially in the poorer nations. To mitigate the problem, the Zambian government put in place a policy to facilitate re-entry of girls who fall pregnant back into the school system after they had babies. The policy that has been in operation for 14 years has benefited many young girls.

Some of the actions that are being taken include:

- Advocacy to ensure pregnant girls go back to school after giving birth and they mix freely with other pupils.
- Counselling services are offered to girls who fall pregnant.
- Bursaries offered to vulnerable children.
- Affirmative action for girls which lowers entry points into higher grades and tertiary education. Some people however feel that this it is discriminating against boys.
- Workshops and discussion forums are being held to discuss challenges encountered by implementing the policy and how these can be addressed.
- Rules have been instituted in schools that protect girl children from GBV and other abuses

There have been challenges with the implementation especially because of the fact that it is not a law but a policy so it is not binding. In a number of cases there is a lack of financial support for them to complete school because their families disown them or if they stay with them tell them there is no more money to cater for all their education needs because they are now taking care of her baby.

The policy allows them to be out of school for a short period, six months and after that have to go back. It is a challenge for many school girls who have no care givers to look after their babies. Guidance and counselling services on reproductive rights to prevent unwanted pregnancies among girls in schools are still sketchy. More funds are required for implementation of the policy so that all girls who require government's assistance can access it including for up scaling advocacy

programmes. In a recent desk review conducted by Restless Development findings indicate that the number of pregnancies among teenagers has been rising in Zambia. According to the 2009 Education Statistical Bulletin by the Ministry of Education, in 2002 there were 3,663 teenage pregnancies among school going teenagers. In 2004, the number rose to 6,528, in 2007 the figure had risen further to 11,391 before reaching a record high of 13,634 in 2009. By 2010, the Ministry of Education reported that there were just under 15,000 teenage pregnancies among school going teenagers in Zambia.

Despite the Re-entry policy, a number of girls who fall pregnant shun to go back to school either due to lack of supportive structures and high levels of stigma among fellow pupils and teachers.

Visitors to Mcenga Secondary School's grade 12 class may be surprised by the fact that many female learners are poised to complete their secondary education upon returning to school after maternity leave; a few even after being away for prolonged periods or marriage. Recently, one returning girl completed grade 12 at the top of her class.

Some of the teachers themselves took maternity leave at Mcenga Secondary School, completed university, and returned in a new capacity: as teachers and role models for other young girls.

Such stories are rare in Zambia where many girls permanently drop out of school due to pregnancy. Mcenga Secondary School, however, is a place where most girls reenter school after pregnancy and complete grade 12.

For many years Zambian girls were obliged to leave school permanently if they became pregnant. In 1997, the Government of the Republic of Zambia introduced the Re-entry Policy that requires all schools to grant girls maternity leave and readmit them to facilitate girls' education. Research on the policy's implementation and impact is scarce. One of the few studies of the policy found that, nationally, secondary school re-entry rates among girls who became pregnant decreased from 79 percent in 2002 to 65 percent in 2008, where they remained until 2014 (Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) 2002-2014)

### **Zambia's Re-Entry Policy**

Approximately 30 percent of the Zambian female population begins childbearing by the age of 19 (Central Statistical Office 2007 and 2013-14), and secondary school enrollment and graduation rates are consistently lower for female than for male learners (MESVTEE 1996 and 2014). It is a declared goal of Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) to increase the numbers of girls who complete secondary education (MESVTEE 2011, 2005 and 1996) because of the well-established benefits of girls' education nationally. These include reduced risk of domestic and other physical violence, reduced infant and child mortality, and a later start to childbearing, which is associated with lower levels of fertility and improved employment and educational opportunities. Higher levels of education are also associated with higher levels of wealth (Central Statistical Office 2013-2014).

In order to facilitate graduation among female students who become pregnant, Zambia's Re-entry Policy established a process by which maternity leave should be granted. To

initiate maternity leave, the girl requesting the leave, the administration of the secondary school she attends, the girl’s parents, and the child’s father fill out a form stating the date on which the girl agrees to return to school (from 6 months to 2 years after she begins her leave).

The Re-entry Policy also obliges schools to ensure a paternity leave of the same length as the maternity leave for the child’s father, if he is a schoolboy, to facilitate joint care taking of the infant. The girl’s parents and the child’s father are asked to sign the maternity leave form in order to mutually accept responsibility for caring for the baby and for supporting the girl’s return to school (MESVTEE, 1997).

Initially, the policy was not widely known or understood so the Zambian government commissioned a study in 2010 that led to the development of implementation guidelines in 2012. These guidelines aimed to improve the understanding and implementation of the policy (MESVTEE, 2012). In particular, the Government of the Republic of Zambia commissioned a study that found that girls are more likely to return to school if they informed the administration of their pregnancy before leaving, stayed in school past the first trimester, and were 20 years of age or older (Mutombo and Mwenda 2010). The guidelines were to be distributed to schools in order to inform students and teachers about the Re-entry Policy, and assist schools and other stakeholders, such as parents and guardians, to enable girls to complete their education after giving birth.

**2. Research Methodology**

This chapter outlines the work plan of how this study was carried out. This work plan covers the methods that were employed throughout this study and this includes; research design, target population, sampling techniques, data collection methods and data analysis.

**2.1 Research Design**

The research design that was used in this study is a descriptive survey. This is the process of collecting data by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. The focus was on collecting data from respondents on challenges faced by girls who fall pregnant and re-admitted back to school.

**2.2 Target Population**

The study targeted girls who have benefited from the re-entry policy in Mpongwe district. It also embraced teachers especially those from guidance and counseling departments and grade teachers.

**2.3 Study Sample**

The study sample consisted 55 respondents’ from three selected schools broken down as follows and presented in table form.

**Table 1:** Study Sample from three selected schools

position	Female	males	Total
Teacher	10	5	15
Pupils	25	15	40
Overall Total	35	20	55

Source: 2016 field work

The study used purposive sampling method to select pupils and teachers. Purposive sampling is the type of sampling that selects a certain group because they are reliable units of the whole to the study.

**2.4 Research Instruments**

In this study, interviews and questionnaires were employed to collect data.

A questionnaire is an important tool in obtaining data in a particular field of enquiry. This is a tool for securing answers to questions, by using a form which the respondent fills in. On the other hand interview is a conversation with a purpose. This helped the researcher to access facts and opinions directly from the participants.

**2.5 Data Collection Techniques**

The most common methods of data collection employed are primary and secondary. Primary data was collected from respondents using questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were given to the teachers grouped in a certain fashion (grade teachers, those in charge of guidance and counseling, those in charge of clubs, those in charge of afternoon section and deputy head teachers), while interviews with the girls were arranged. Secondary data was obtained from various sources such as books, internet, journals and topics in related organizational documents.

**2.6 Data Analysis**

The data collected in the study was analyzed using qualitative methods. Themes were identified and classified then presented in table form. When the data collected was made manageable, the preference was to code the raw data and summaries it into descriptive statements. Categories of recurrent themes were grouped together systematically allowing for the categories to emerge and flow while constantly conferring and confirming from the raw data. Special attention was paid to data that seemed to contradict the flow. The aim of doing so was to provide an accurate description and assessment of the experience of girls re-admitted back to school after pregnancy or rather adolescent girl mothers.

**3. Research Findings**

This chapter presents the research findings based on the data collected from teachers and pupils from the three selected schools in Mpongwe district.

**Table 2:** Demographic background of respondents by schools

Kanyeda primary school	10
Mpongwe secondary school	10
Nkulumashiba Primary School	10
Nkumbu primary school	5
Nkulumashiba primary school	5
Chintifu Secondary school	5
Nkumbu primary school	5

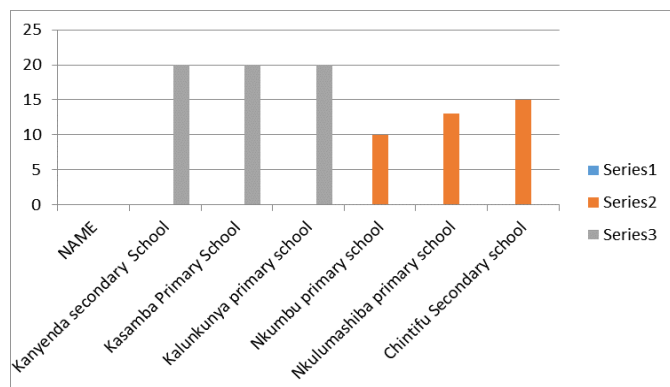
Source: Field Work 2016

The table above shows that the respondents from the three schools 10 from Kanyenda primary school, 10 Mpongwe secondary school, 10 from Nkulumashiba primary school just to mention a few.

**Table 3:** Demographic background of respondents by sex

Name	Total	Males	Females
Kanyeda primary school	10	3	7
Mpongwe secondary school	10	6	4
Nkulumashiba Primary Sch	10	5	5
Nkumbu primary school	5	2	3
Nkulumashiba primary sch	5	4	1
Chintifu Secondary school	5	3	2
Nkumbu primary school	11	5	6

**Charts by schools by gender**



Source: Field Work 2017

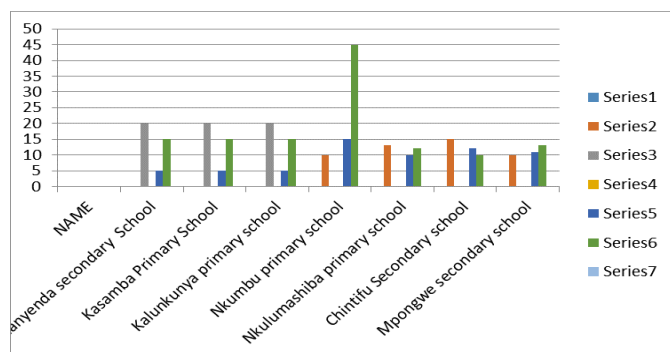
**Fig 1**

**Table 4:** Demographic background of respondents by positions

Name	Total	Teachers	Pupils
Kanyeda secondary School	20	5	15
Kasamba Primary School	20	5	15
Kalunkunya primary school	20	5	15
Nkumbu primary school	10	15	45
Nkulumashiba primary school	13	10	12
Chintifu Secondary school	15	12	10
Mpongwe secondary school	10	11	13

Source: Field Work 2017

**Chart on Demographic background of respondents by positions**



Source: 2017 field work

**Fig 2**

**3.1 Knowledge about Re-entry policy**

Teachers talked to reviewed that they had knowledge of the policy and were able to articulate what it was. What was interesting to note, is the fact that of the 45 re-admitted girls talked to about 30 learned about the re-entry policy from their friends rather than their teachers and parents.

This finding is similar to the findings of a study conducted in Zambia by CHANGE 2 programme (2006) on sources of information of young people. That study reviewed that pupils learned about HIV and AIDS from their friends than from teachers and parents. Equally amazing to note is that of the 15 teachers talked to, 10 reviewed that they came to know about the policy through the media. While 5 have seen the circular and its guidelines.

**Table 5:** Responses from Teachers on Sources of Knowledge of Re-Entry Policy

10 TEACHERS	MEDIA
5 TEACHERS	CIRCULAR

Source: Field Work 2017

Research has shown that having a clear understanding of the policy and its guidelines is an essential requirement if individual schools if they are to correctly implement this policy. A certain head teacher talked to reviewed that the Ministry has not been inclusive during the policy formulation process. We are directed to implement the policies developed at the top with no guidelines”. The guidelines were only received after five years from the time the policy was launched. We needed more sensitization so as to prepare and adjust accordingly.

The table shows how the respondents learned about the re-entry policy.

**Table 6:** Knowledge about the policy

Participant	Heard from a Friend	From the Media	Seen the Policy Circular	Heard from Teachers / Parents
Teacher	-	10	5	-
Re-admitted girls	30	3	2	10

Source: Field Work 2017

What was unclear was the number of times a girl can be re-admitted after pregnancy. The teachers talked to clearly stated that there should be a limit to how many times a girl should be pregnant and re-admitted. One teacher jokingly said “a school is not a market place for girls to just get pregnant as many times as she can, no.” This fact agrees with the similar concerns raised at the Ministry of Education joint annual review of 2004 on the number of times a girl can be re-admitted after pregnancy.

**Table 7:** Girl Dropout and Re-admission in Sampled Schools

School	No. of dropout due To Pregnancy in 2015	No. of Re-admissions in 2016	No. of transfers to other Schools
Kanyeda secondary School	45	25	16
Kasamba Primary School	19	9	15
Kalunkunya primary school	27	15	18
Nkumbu primary school	15	12	11
Mpongwe secondary school	14	14	12

Source: Field Work 2017

### Chart of Girl Dropout and Re-admission in Sampled Schools

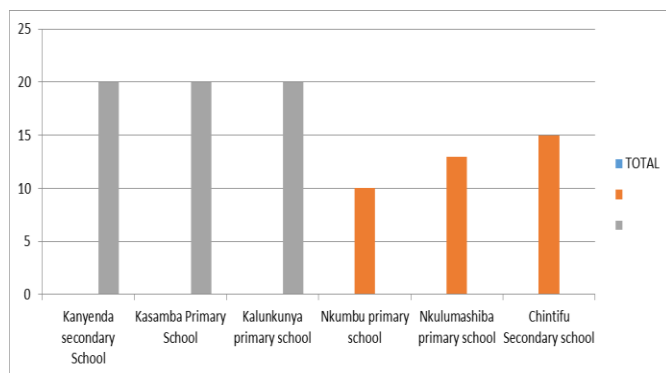


Fig3

### 3.2 Highlighted Challenges faced by Girls in the three Sampled Schools

The table above shows the number of girls readmitted back to school this year in three sampled schools, the first school had about 16 of its girls transferred to other schools. When asked one of the teachers, why this was the case, she openly stated that “it’s hard for girls to stay in this school, because they are mockingly called names by their friends and some teachers.” She further added that of the readmitted girls in the school a good number of them are in the afternoon section. In the morning there are only about 3 girls.

The second school also reviewed a similar situation, but one striking thing to note about the second school is that the girls are readmitted back into afternoon section. One teacher revealed that “we encourage our girls to be in the afternoon section so that they can have enough time to prepare for school.”

But another teacher expressed his displeasure, saying that it’s not fair to readmit a girl in the afternoon after pregnancy. It is a kind of stigmatizing her because her peers will think she moved to the afternoon section because she is now a mother, this leads to absenteeism in most cases. One of the girls explained that she is not happy with the fact that she is re-admitted back into afternoon section because of the stigma associated with it. She said that everyone knows that the afternoon section is for mothers even when it is not everyone who is a mother.

The third school had most of its girls transferred to other schools. This was attributed to the fact that the school is coeducation and one of the biggest in the district. The girls reviewed that they are scared of been teased by peers and embarrassed by teachers who sometimes refer to them as “our fellow parents”. This forces them to go to other schools where they can be treated like other pupils rather than as parents.

The views of the girls converged with those of teachers, both categories of respondents stated that the policy was good but it did not address most of their concerns. When asked what their concerns were, the girls reported that the policy should have spelt out the need for counseling sessions for them.

The girls said that, “we need to be encouraged by our teachers and parents, because it is not easy to be a mother and a school girl at the same time.” Combining the two roles of being a mother and pupil is really hard particularly when the children

are not feeling well, they absent themselves from school so that they can take care of the children. They further reported that the policy should have put in place measures to follow up those who temporarily return to school and completely dropout.

Some of the teachers reported that, policy makers are sometimes not in touch with reality. This is the reason they should seek consensus from most of us who interact with the children on the daily basis. If we had participated in the policy design, we would have been in the right position to address the challenges encountered now.

Oliver (1996:9) [8]: “if head teachers learn about change through the medium of memoranda and circular, they will not earn that sense of ownership which is crucial if change is to be truly successful.” Although Oliver’s views are about head teachers, they can also be applied to teachers and pupils who are at the receiving end of policies in this context.

In spite of the concept of change in schools, the finding of this study found that pupils, teachers and head teachers were not involved at the initial stage of policy formulation. If they were maybe the story could have been different because they could have had that sense of ownership of the policy.

Another challenge noted by the researcher is the hostility of the school environment; the teachers stated that the school environments are not conducive enough for the re-admitted girls. When asked to clearly state why the environment was not conducive, the respondent said “the school environments are hostile in sense that they do not adjust in any way to accommodate the re-admitted girls.” This finding is converged with the literature that point out the fact that when the girls returned to school they found hostile environments.

The findings of this study revealed that the girls are subjected to verbal abuse especially from female teachers.

The girls reported that they feel stigmatized and out of place because of derogatory remarks from female teachers. It was the view of the girls that the Ministry of Education was doing very little to enforce the implementation of the policy and ensure that those who returned are protected from verbal abuse by the teachers.

Respondent reported that their self-esteem is deeply affected because of the treatment they receive from teachers. They further stated that they are not free to participate in class hence their attention is derailed leading to poor performance. One of the guidance counseling teachers talked to disclosed that the girls can perform well if they are encouraged and assured.

The thing is that “they are so scared of even raising up their hands in class, he stated.” The teacher explained that, it can be of great help if the Ministry of Education can set some funds aside to conduct massive sensitization workshop for teachers at school level.

Despite the policy discourse favouring an education for all approach, the implementers of the policy at school level have moved away from this priority as most of the girls temporarily return to school and completely dropout due to lack of moral support from teachers and peers.

One of the teachers pointed out that “the re-entry policy guidelines in their current state give no room to teachers to adjust it accordingly to their context.” As a result it is almost impossible if not impossible for the schools to adjust in any way so as to help the girls re-orient themselves after delivery.

**Table 8:** Presence of clubs in the sampled schools

School	Name of Club	Roles
Nkumbu primary school	SAFE and ANTI-AIDS	Educating girls and boys to remain virgins. Educating both sexes on the dangers, prevention effects of AIDS.
Kalunkunya primary school	SAFE and ANTI-AIDS	Teaches both sexes not to engage in sex. Teaches the pupils on matters to do with HIV/AIDS
Mpongwe secondary school	SAFE and ANTI-AIDS	Provides sex health education. Teaches pupils about HIV/AIDS

Source: Field Work 2017

The table above indicates the presence of two clubs in all the three sampled schools. The roles of these clubs in schools is of great importance, however the researcher agrees with the respondents that stated that the “the clubs are for the good girls not for us who got pregnant because we love sex.” This fact is true because a critical analysis of the roles of these clubs revealed some striking facts such as; the girls and boys should keep their virginity and avoid sex. This indirectly stigmatizes the re-admitted girls who have lost their virginity. Another girl jokingly said “it is as difficult as getting the message preached about beer drinking when you were found holding a bottle of beer by the pastor the previous day.” The clubs don’t make sense in our situation the respondents’ bemoaned.

The researcher also discovered that lack of support is not only present at school level but also homes of the re-admitted girls. The girls said sometimes at home they do not have people to leave the children with, hence they opt to abscond themselves from school so that they can take care of the babies. In some instances parents/guardians withdraw their financial support, most of the re-admitted girls are been assisted by FAWEZA.

**3.3 Summary of the Findings**

While the re-entry policy is a worthwhile and an almost home grown initiative that gives a second chance to adolescent school mothers to complete their education, this contributes to the attainment of EFA goals. There are a number of critical issues that can be isolated from the re-entry policy implementation process, which participants referred to as present potential challenges to the success of the policy.

The major challenges faced by the re-admitted girls are; hostile environments, verbal abuse from both peers and teachers especially female teachers, lack of counseling sessions, lack of thorough understanding of the policy and its guidelines at the school level, difficulties in combining both roles of motherhood and being a pupil, lack of support from teachers, parents and peers.

This leads to low self-esteem that breeds fear and a sense of UN belonging that eventually derail their attention in class and affect their performance negatively.

**4. Discussion of the Findings**

This chapter gives a detailed analysis of the findings and tries to bridge the gaps in research findings.

It is evidenced from the findings that the planners of the re-entry policy over simplified the implementation process. Although the planners have the power to give directives to the schools to implement the policy, school level implementers

also re-make the policy and implement it based o their own contexts. This is true in the case where one of the schools has literally opted to put most of its re-admitted girls in the afternoon. When the guidelines do not stipulate that girls should be re-admitted to any particular section.

While policy makers and planners may argue that the policy and its guidelines are clear, hence it faces no challenges; this may not be the case at school level. For example while the policy promotes gender parity by addressing the issue related to pregnancy, this study found that a good number of girls temporarily return to school and dropout completely. Some of the reasons given relate to hostile environments, lack of support for those who returned and verbal abuse to mention but a few.

Therefore, to turn a blind eye on these factors will impede the intended goal of the policy it can be observed from the findings that, teachers do not provide a favourable environment for the re-admitted girls to actively participate in class. The teachers do not have time to talk to the girls to find out the cause of their divided attention in class.

Maybe it could be that their children are not feeling well or they are worried about whom to leave their children with. However, the findings reviewed that some teachers are always there for girls. There is need to sensitize other teachers about the re-entry policy so that they can embrace the re-admitted girls, looking at the source of knowledge about the policy from the media and some of them have never seen the circular. This makes it hard for them to effectively implement the policy and its guidelines.

The findings shows that the roles of the clubs in schools are not good enough, these are supposed to be there for girls in one way or the other. So their roles should not be discriminatory but the opposite. This is where the girls should be provided with the platform to share their experiences so that other girls can learn from them.

The findings from the three sampled schools are converged with the researcher’s thought about the challenges faced by the girls who fall pregnant and re-admitted back to school.

**5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings of this study clearly show that there are challenges faced by girls who fall pregnant and re-admitted back to school after pregnancy. Some of the challenges are that they are mocked by other pupils making them find it difficult to suit the school environment. Many have no one to look after their babies at home making them fail to concentrate at school. They also do not have resources to look after their own baby and pay school fees.

Despite being part and a signatory to a number of international conventions on the right to education for all upon which the re-entry policy is based, for Zambia this right is not clearly understood or addressed. In this study, the findings show that the implementation of the re-entry policy is saddled with challenges.

The main reason is that the implementers at school level have been relegated to the periphery of the policy formulation process. Making it very hard to implement the policy circular and its guidelines because it does not take into account the various contexts in which it is being implemented.

## 6. Recommendations to the Ministry of Education and Schools

- There is need for the Ministry of Education to recognize a concept of contingency and allow for diversity of views and perspectives from other stakeholders.
- The ministry of Education and Schools should broaden their monitoring tools to enable them monitor and provide support for girls, so that they do not temporarily return and dropout completely.
- The Ministry of Education should strengthen the guidance and counseling sections at school level and incorporate the aspect of providing emotional and psychological support for the re-entry girls.
- Schools should hold, “massive sensitization workshops for teachers, parents/guardians and pupils time to time.
- The Schools should promote the presence of clubs and broaden their roles so that the re-admitted girls can be accommodated.

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